

## Lesson 3 – Online Strangers, Predators, and the Grooming Process

### Learning Objectives

- Define an online stranger as anyone met exclusively online.
- List safety rules/advice of behavior toward strangers in the physical community that also apply to behavior toward strangers in Cyberspace.
- Recognize steps in an online predator's grooming process.
- Recognize how to respond appropriately/safely to Internet strangers.

### Introductory Discussion

- Ask how many students use the Internet, and how many go online alone.
- Ask what they like to do online.
- Ask if it is their intention to talk to adults while online.
- Ask how they know if someone is their age when online.

### Peer-to-Peer Activity

#### *Information Activity Directions:*

- Provide each student with a question cut from the information activity page.
- Tell students that each has a unique question. They are to try to get that answer from five different students without asking the question directly. They cannot simply come out and ask. They will have one minute to prepare their thoughts and questioning procedure.
- Direct the players to pair up (at teacher discretion). Inform students that they have one minute to negotiate conversation and find the answer to their question.
- Have students change partners five times, allowing one minute per each grouping.
- Ask students to raise their hands if they found it easy or if they got their answers. Ask how they got their answer without asking the question. Discuss some of the strategies used to uncover answers.
- Ask who had a difficult time, and have them explain why. Ask if some people resisted giving information. Did this make the assignment more difficult? Would it also make it difficult for someone online to find information?
- Use the information game to show that people can find out things in indirect ways. Explain that some people do this online and use the information they gain to pretend to be your friend.
- Explain that it may be easier to get direct information on the Internet because it is through writing.

### Discussion

Guide students into a discussion about the concept that anyone met exclusively online (not a known friend from the physical community) is a stranger.

- Ask students to define the term "stranger."
- Ask students to list common advice/rules concerning strangers in the physical world.
- Explain to students that those rules also apply online. All people MET exclusively online are strangers. Nothing is really known about these people.

Define "online predator."

- Explain that some people lie about who they are and what they want on the Internet for various reasons. Sometimes it is to steal an identity or to bully. Other times it is to meet children and teens to form an inappropriate relationship. These people are known as "online predators."

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- Ask students if they know what the word “predator” means. Take their answers and try to form a definition.
  - Relate their answers to online *predators* by reinforcing the following: A *predator* is one who stalks or uses lies, secrecy, or stealth, to get close enough to another person in order to easily hurt or harm them.
  - Ask students if they know what the word *prey* means. Take their answers and try to form a definition.

Define “prey.”

- One who is a victim or is vulnerable to victimization by a predator is prey.
- Relate the concept to the online environment.

Minimize danger.

- Inform students that there are things they can do to minimize the danger and the chances of becoming prey to an online predator.
- These safety precautions include choosing a safe screen name, not revealing information on the Internet, and carefully choosing with whom to communicate.
- Inform students that no matter what, it is important to tell an adult if they feel uncomfortable online or are approached by someone who discusses inappropriate things or wants to meet them offline.

### Group Activity

Hand out the reference pages on the grooming process.

Review steps in the grooming process.

#### (1) SIMILAR INTERESTS

An online predator will establish a relationship by discussing common interests, likes, and dislikes with the intended victim. This leads to a feeling of familiarity and a friendship. A predator can find potential prey to begin a relationship by searching online profiles and screen names for interesting topics, such as particular sports or hobbies, as well as birth dates or ages. Once the grooming process starts, the victim feels like he or she really knows the predator. It is difficult to consider this “friend” a “stranger.”

Reinforce: If you have only communicated with someone online, you cannot be sure if the person is who he/she claims to be. People online are not always who they say they are. It is very easy for anyone to feel like he or she knows someone online when it is not really true. A predator uses this concept to his/her advantage.

#### (2) TRUST

A predator will want to listen to anything the victim wants to talk about. This tactic is used to build trust. For example: If you are being victimized, the following might be a typical scenario. If you have a bad day at school or at home, he will be sympathetic. He will tell you that he understands. You will begin to believe that this person really cares about you.

Reinforce: The longer people “talk” and share online, the more the victim will come to believe that this online person is no longer a stranger but actually a friend. Soon a sense of trust is developed in this false friend. A predator uses this to try to separate the victim from his or her true friends and family.

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(3) **SECRECY**

As the relationship progresses, a predator will usually ask the victim to keep the friendship secret from others. He/she may explain that other people, especially parents, won't understand how you (the victim) can be such good friends with someone who you met on the Internet. This approach gives the predator confidence that it will be more difficult for an adult to step in and protect the victim.

Reinforce: This type of behavior is a very important warning sign. Anytime an online "friend" asks to keep the relationship a secret, recognize this as a warning, and report it to a trusted adult. A true friend would not need to keep the relationship a secret.

(4) **BREAK DOWN BARRIERS.**

Once the predator has built a trusting relationship he or she will continue to break down barriers in order to achieve the ultimate goal of a face-to-face meeting.

One way this is accomplished is by sending pictures that may at first make the victim feel uncomfortable. This often happens because kids and teens are naturally curious about many things. Predators prey on that curiosity and continue to feed it so that the victim will not be afraid. This is done by gradually sending more and more pictures and other inappropriate material so that the victim becomes less sensitive to things that normally would make him/her uncomfortable.

Reinforce – It is normal to be curious, but students should know that it is against the law for anyone to send pictures of people (of any age) without their clothes on to someone they know is under 18 years old. This criminal action must be reported to a trusted adult and/or law enforcement.

Discuss with the students that if anyone sends them pictures or any other material that make them feel uncomfortable for any reason—please tell a trusted adult (parent, teacher, law enforcement officer).

(5) **MAKE THREATS.**

Sometimes, but not always, a predator will threaten the (victim). A predator may threaten in different ways to keep the victim from telling an adult. One tactic is to use a reverse threat.

Example: Imagine you are a victim. A predator will tell you that if you tell anyone, he or she will tell your parents about your relationship, then your parents will be really mad at you and may take away your computer or ground you. The predator may tell you that he or she knows where you live and can harm you or your family.

Reinforce (1): Students need to know that if anyone ever threatens them, online or offline, they need to tell a trusted adult. The ultimate goal of an Internet predator is always to get the victim to meet with him or her in person.

Reinforce (2): As intelligent young people, they may believe they can never be tricked by an adult they meet online. But the fact is, criminals make it their business to devise ways to deceive them.

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### **Wrap-Up Discussion**

- Review and reinforce the concept with students that anyone met online is a stranger.
- Have students name the steps a predator uses to groom a potential victim.
- Reinforce: It is important to never reveal personal information online and have safe screen names so as to not be targeted by strangers online.
- Reinforce: It is important to report behavior by a stranger online that makes them uncomfortable, asks for personal information, or requests a face-to-face meeting.
- Ask students to give reasons why knowing about the grooming process can make them more confident users of Internet communications.

# *The Grooming Process*

How can you be sure who you're talking to online? Internet predators use what is known as the grooming process to create seemingly safe online relationships and then betray that friendship by attempting to break down barriers and cause harm.

Online predators find their "prey" by going to chat rooms where young people gather or by searching online profiles for a specific type of victim.

Predators use a process to "groom" their victims, which usually follows this pattern:

(1) Establishes similar Interests through chatting or instant messaging. This leads to more private communication like e-mail and phone calls.

(2) Builds trust. A predator counts on the fact that establishing so much in common with an online friend will lead to a trusting relationship. A predator is hoping that you will develop such a trust that you will separate yourself from your true friends and family.

(3) Keeps it a secret. It is a predator's goal to keep the friendship a secret from others. Engaging in a secret friendship like this leaves you vulnerable.

(4) Breaks down barriers. A predator works on the trust that has been established and may break down barriers further by exposing you, the victim, to pictures or materials that may at first make you uncomfortable. This is a common tactic because kids and teens are naturally curious about many things. The more a victim is exposed to, the less he or she will feel that it is wrong.

(5) Makes threats. Sometimes, but not always, a predator will make threats to the intended victim to keep the relationship a secret. Online threats are against the law. Think about it: Would a real friend threaten you or your family with harm?

(6) Meets face to face. The ultimate goal of an Internet predator is to get the intended victim to meet with him or her in person. You may believe that you can never be tricked by someone you meet online, but remember that predators make it their business to learn tactics to deceive their prey. NEVER meet anyone in person who you only know online.

## **Best Advice**

Online friendships can be fun, but always consider what kind of information you are sharing.

If you notice that one of your online friendships is following the grooming process pattern, proceed very cautiously. There is no reason for an online friend to want to have a secret relationship with you and/or to force you to meet in person.

Let your friends and family know about people you meet online, and tell someone immediately if you are threatened or feel uncomfortable about anything that is said or sent online.

### Information Activity

Directions: Duplicate one or more pages (35 questions to a page) so that each student will have 1 question. Cut out questions on solid lines, and pass out 1 to each student.

Do you have a dog?	How tall are you?	What size shoe do you wear?
Do you have a cat?	What is your worst fear?	If you could be an animal – what animal would you be?
What is your favorite color?	What is your best memory?	What type of music do you like?
What is your favorite food?	How would you describe yourself?	What do you do most on a computer?
Where would you like to go on vacation?	What is your favorite subject in school?	What chores do you have?
How many brothers do you have?	What do you do on the weekends?	What is your phone number?
How many sisters do you have?	What is your favorite holiday?	Who was your favorite teacher?
What hobbies do you have?	How old are you?	What is the name of your school?
What is your favorite movie?	Who is your favorite actress/actor?	What is your favorite television show?
What is your favorite song?	What is your favorite book?	What city do you live in or near?
Who is your hero?	What is your favorite ice cream flavor?	What is your least favorite subject in school?
What sports do you like?		
What would you like to be when you grow up?		